



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The War with Mexico. By JUSTIN H. SMITH. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1919. Two volumes: xxii, 572; xiv, 620 pp.

If there is one tradition more firmly established than any other in American historical writing, it is that the Mexican War was a disgrace to our country. Schouler, Rhodes, Von Holst, in short, practically every historian who deals with the "middle period" (except Burgess, Rives and Garrison), condemn the administration of President Polk for bullying poor, weak Mexico into war by its aggressive imperialism in the interest of slavery. Schouler speaks of our "profligate contempt of Mexico's rights of sovereignty" and of our "repeating in Mexico the story of Pizarro, only with shabbier embellishment" (II, 443, 446). Rhodes says that "Mexico was actually goaded into the war", and that "negotiation in the same spirit as that had with Great Britain would have undoubtedly settled the difficulty" (I, 87). Probably the chief source of the popular conviction of the wickedness of the Mexican War is James Russell Lowell's *Bigelow Papers*, which so mercilessly ridiculed the talk of our "destinies", and counselled resistance to the recruiting sergeant in language that would have landed the author in Leavenworth if used after April 6, 1917.

Professor Smith did not set out to justify the Mexican War. "His view of the war at the outset of his special inquiries", he confesses, "coincided substantially with that prevailing in New England, and the subject was taken up simply because he felt that it had not been studied thoroughly" (page ix). The time has come, he believes, when "new opinions, resting upon facts, will be acceptable in the place of opinions resting largely upon traditional prejudices and misinformation" (*ibid*).

Every student of Professor Smith's earlier work, *The Annexation of Texas*, knew what to expect from the author in the way of diligent and judicious exploitation of the sources; but the most prepared must stand astonished before the imposing array of justificative material on which the present volumes are based. Of the approximately 1200 pages of the work, 350 are devoted to notes in fine print, corroborating, with accumulative evidence often reaching a score and more of references, every controvertible statement or judgment in the text. There is an appendix of 42 pages, containing more than 2000 titles of archival deposits, manuscripts, personal papers, books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers and serials. The volumes consulted in the Archivo de Guerra at Mexico City alone, says the author, "occupy some 200 feet of shelf

room; and the papers examined in the Archivo de Guerra y Marina . . . would probably, if placed one on another, make a pile 60 feet high" (I, 403). This enormous mass of material, with equally voluminous sources in the archives at Washington, is the bedrock foundation of Professor Smith's solid structure. Surely, the most exacting scholar could not ask for better evidence of scientific responsibility.

But it is not alone the demands of the scholar that have been generously satisfied in Professor Smith's work. The educated reader who enjoys a style compounded of vigor, justice, color and fine discrimination, will lay down the volumes with a feeling of regret that his intellectual feast is finished. There is not a dull page from beginning to end. Whether he is describing an engagement among the hills of Nuevo Leon or discussing the mazes of Latin diplomacy or exposing the inconsistencies of the Whig obstructionists at Washington or delineating the shifty character of an opportunist at Mexico City, the author carries us along with a consentment that is never disturbed by the misgiving that rhetoric is being used as a support for untested conjecture. It is not an exaggeration to say that some of the descriptive passages, like Scott's landing at Vera Cruz (II, chapter xxii) or Wool's march from San Antonio to Agua Nueva (I, chapter xiii) or the battlefield of Buena Vista (I, chapter xx), rise to the majestic style of a Macaulay or a Trevelyan.

Professor Smith states that he had a threefold purpose in preparing this work: the conviction that the Mexican War had been neglected by American historians on account of its unpopularity; the belief that in such accounts as exist "a number of important topics" (such as the conditions in Mexico just before the war, the influence of American politics on the war, the attitude of foreign countries toward Mexico and the United States at the time) had been "treated superficially or not at all"; and the desire "to handle more carefully the material previously used." How well the last purpose has been fulfilled we have already seen; and few will question the statement that the Mexican War, considering the enormous consequences that it brought, has not received adequate attention from American historians. The student and the general reader alike will be most interested, we believe, in certain chapters (I, chapters i-vi; II, chapters xxi, xxxiv-xxxvi) in which Professor Smith discusses the genesis of the war, its justice, the method in which it was conducted and the nature of the opposition to it.

On all these points the author has reached conclusions at variance

with the traditional view and has fortified these conclusions with a wealth of contemporary testimony which must convince the most skeptical. He has exposed with skill and patience the unsoundness of the syllogisms in which our historians have generally reasoned. For example: President Polk wanted California; a war with Mexico occurred, and California was ceded to the United States; hence, Polk went to war with Mexico to get California. Or, the South wanted more slave territory; the war with Mexico brought the recognition of the annexation of Texas and the cession of New Mexico; hence, the war was fought to extend slave territory. Or, Mexico was a weak power; the United States was strong enough to conquer her; hence, the United States attacked Mexico and robbed her of her fair provinces. The conclusions do not follow logically from the premises. Undoubtedly Polk wanted California—as did many of the Whigs. Expansion was a popular slogan. The “destiny” of the United States to occupy the whole continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific was a tradition cherished since the days of Jefferson. But Polk was not willing to go to war with Mexico for the sake of acquiring California. On the contrary, he was ready to sacrifice the hope of gaining California for the sake of keeping peace with Mexico. His instructions to Slidell, our envoy to Mexico, in November, 1845, were explicit. Slidell was to take up our claims on the Mexican government in “a prudent and friendly spirit”. “If you can do so without endangering the restoration of amicable relations with Mexico and the adjustment of the Texan boundary, endeavor to purchase at least the northern part of California, including San Francisco Bay, but at all events conciliate the good will of the Mexicans, even should their vanity and resentment prove trying” (I, 95). Unless we are to adopt Alexander H. Stephens’s theory that this was all the camouflage of “Polk the Mendacious”—a theory which would reduce the historian to a plane a little lower than the fortune-teller’s—we must regard the foregoing instructions and many other of like tenor as sincere attempts on the part of the administration to compose our differences with Mexico.

The plain truth is that Mexico did not want to have those differences composed. No one of the military adventurers who succeeded each other so rapidly in the possession of the Mexican government (*i. e.*, of the treasury and the mint) could hope for a fortnight’s tenure of power unless he flattered the spirit of malignant chauvinism which had taken hold of the Mexican people. A perusal of Professor Smith’s fifth chapter on “The Mexican Attitude on the Eve of the War” ought to dispel from the mind any lingering trace of the doctrine of American

aggression. The Mexican press heaped insults on the United States, calling our flag "a dirty rag" which covered "cowards and bullies". The Mexican politicians, "with that fatal fluency which their intoxicating idiom encouraged", inflamed the people and the press: "We have numerous and veteran forces burning with the desire to gain immortal renown", said the Official Bulletin of San Luis Potosi. Herrera and Paredes refused to treat with Slidell, even to give him an audience, because they were afraid of running counter to the truculent war spirit of their people. Even Daniel Webster, who hated the Polk administration, declared that the behavior of Mexico was "highly unjustifiable". The British consul at Mexico City, who certainly was not anxious to see amicable relations established between Mexico and the United States, acknowledged that our diplomatic conduct was "perfectly correct". Though one may make a quarrel, it takes two to make it up. "Out of their own mouths" Professor Smith has convicted the Mexicans of the responsibility for the war: Ramirez said that it was due to his country's "procrastination and vanity"; Santa Anna himself confessed in 1847, "Mexico desired it" (I, 442).

As to Mexico's pretext for war in the annexation of Texas, and Polk's aggressiveness in sending General Taylor to the Rio Grande, Professor Smith brings abundant evidence to show that Mexico had little interest in Texas and no expectation of subduing it. Many of the Mexican officials, according to Santa Anna's own statement, "did not know where Texas was or what nation claimed it". Whatever the objections might be to the expediency or the righteousness of increasing the slave territory, the legal right of the United States to annex the independent state of Texas was clear. We were anxious to adjust every question of boundaries and claims arising from that annexation, but Mexico absolutely refused. Taylor's march to the Rio Grande was for the defence of the soil of Texas, a state of the American Union. It was parallel to General Pershing's recent march to the borders of New Mexico. Long before Taylor appeared at Corpus Christi, the Mexicans had planned and ordered the invasion of Texas. The plans of the Mexican engineers for crossing not only the Rio Grande but also the Sabine were prepared in 1845. Mejia ordered irregular troops into Texas in February, 1846. Mariano Otero, a Mexican senator from the state of Jalisco, wrote in his paper, *El Siglo XIX*, in October, 1847: "The American forces did not advance to the Rio Grande until after the war became inevitable, and then only as an army of observation". Taylor even offered to keep the river open to commerce if the Mexicans would refrain from hostilities. But Gen-

eral Arista had his orders from President Paredes, dated April 18: "It is indispensable that hostilities begin, yourself taking the initiative" (orders captured in Arista's baggage and printed in the *Washington Union* of August 27, 1847; I, 458, note 35). President Polk's laconic statement to Congress that war had been begun by the act of Mexico on soil of the United States was literally true, in spite of all the Whig objections and "spot resolutions".

It is true that we were a strong nation, and Mexico a weak and distracted one. But weakness does not give immunity to injustice. Benton's sneer that we marched down to the Rio Grande because Mexico was a weak power, and did not march up to the parallel 54° 40' because Great Britain was a strong power, is not pertinent. With an infinitely better case against Mexico than against Great Britain we made far more honest and honorable efforts to reach an agreement. If we composed the case with England, it was because we were dealing with an opponent willing to treat, courteous, reliable,—in a word, civilized. It is true also that the Mexican War brought a train of woe for the American nation; but the rejection of the Wilmot Proviso has no logical nexus with Polk's announcement to his cabinet on April 21, 1846, that our relations with Mexico "could not be permitted to remain as they were". It was, in short, an unfortunate coincidence and not a "sinister conspiracy" that connected our long overdue reckoning with the Mexican republic with the bitter slavery struggle of 1850. If there were northern Whigs who opposed the war because they believed that it would further the slavery interests, there were also southern Democrats who opposed it because they feared that it would weaken those same interests. Calhoun was a conspicuous example of the latter class, protesting against a policy which would be a drain on the man power of the South, for the sake of enhancing and further "consolidating" the federal power.

Professor Smith's chapter on "The War in American Politics" (I, chapter xxxiv) is a startling revelation of the conduct of the Whig opposition in Congress and in the press. No abstract of it can suffice. The whole chapter must be read for an appreciation of the inconsistencies and insincerities of the men who opposed the war because it was conducted by James K. Polk, while they "groomed" the "Hero of Buena Vista" for the presidency.

Those students of American history who, like the reviewer, have been unwilling to accept the traditional interpretation of the Mexican War as a disgraceful episode in our country's annals, will derive comfort from Professor Smith's volumes. And those who are still minded to

cast the blame on our government will find it difficult to deal with material which the author furnishes to show that "no other course than that taken by Polk would have been patriotic or even rational".

DAVID S. MUZZEY.

Woodrow Wilson and his Work. By WILLIAM E. DODD.
Garden City, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920.—xiv, 369 pp.

This is an excellent and important book. In the first place, its author had exceptional qualifications for writing it. Like the President himself, he is of Southern antecedents; and there are few persons who know Southern life and thought so well, and perhaps none who can interpret them more accurately. He writes clearly and vigorously. He is a trained historian, and he recognizes the special obligation which rests upon the writer of contemporary history to deal with his subject in a spirit of truth and justice, lest he mislead later generations as Parson Weems long misled Americans with his fictions about George Washington.

In the second place, the book represents prolonged and painstaking research. Personal acquaintance and occasional conversations with the President; consultations with numerous men of information and of the most varied views, in public and private life; careful use of the printed materials; discriminating personal observation, backed up by an unusual understanding of the whole sweep of American history—these are the ample sources from which the author has drawn in every part of his work.

Finally, the book is much more than a mere biography. The central figure is throughout set against the background of his times, and after a few early chapters of an essentially biographical nature are passed the volume broadens into practically a history of the United States in the decade 1910-19. A surprisingly large amount of history, indeed, is compressed into two or three hundred pages of print.

The reviewer's opinion is that no better account of Woodrow Wilson's early environment and training and of his career as college professor and university president will ever be written. Concerning the remainder of the book no such opinion can, of course, be expressed. It deals with great movements, complex conditions, mighty controversies; and even if the evidence were all in hand, the author himself would be the last person to aspire to finality of treatment at this time. The "final verdict", he remarks, has not yet been pronounced upon Julius Caesar! All that we have a right to ask in this portion of the